Meagan Hoffman

Mrs. Patterson

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Poetry Project

Walt Whitman’s *IN CABIN'D SHIPS AT SEA*

Walt Whitman’s poem *In Cabin’d Ships at Sea*, is a very naturistic poem that makes the reader want to be on the ship, on the water with the character in the poem. This poem touches over many things in which a poem should have, such as a speaker, the tone, imagery, figurative language, sound, and theme. Whitman incorporates these into his poem with a smooth transition between each, which makes the poem more enjoyable and more realistic.

The speaker of the Whitman’s poem *In Cabin’d Ships at Sea,* is a young sailor boy who is out to see the sea. The speaker’s point of view is that of the observer, but incorporates first person into one of the lines: “by sailors young and old haply will I…” (9) The speaker’s audience is no one. The sailor is not speaking this poem aloud to anyone, but thinking it in his head. This is what the poet observed while out at sea, and is taking in all of its beautiful sights to be seen. The speaker’s argument is that the poem that he is observing while out at sea is that the nature of what the waves are doing and how the wind blows and what it does, it is the nature of the ocean, the beauty of what the ocean holds before the sailor.

The main tones of this poem are dreamy, peaceful, and picturesque. These are the main tones of the poem because of lines such as “With whistling winds and music of the waves, the large, imperious waves,” (3) and “Where joyous full of faith, spreading white sails, She cleaves the ether mid the sparkle and the foam of day, or under many a star at night,” (6). These lines show the dreamy tones, the peaceful tones with “or under many a star at night,” (8) and the picturesque tones with “the sparkle and the foam of day,” (7).

Imagery is present throughout this entire naturalistic poem. The imagery that relates to feel is the wind, the deck beneath their feet, and the pulsation of the boat moving through the water. These images are present through the entire poem, as well as the other imagery that is included in this poem. The perfume that is mentioned in line 22 coincides with the image of smell. The poem does not elaborate on what the smell is; it could be the salty air, or the perfume of a woman on board. Hearing is imagery that is consistent during the entire poem. “Music of the waves,” (3) “the faint creaking of the cordage, the melancholy rhythm,” (22) these are examples of the hearing imagery present in Whitman’s words. Imagery that is present in this poem is seeing. Whitman includes seeing imagery as such: “boundless blue on every side expanding,” (2) “spreading white sails,” (6) “the sparkle and the foam…” (7) And “boundless vista and the horizon far and dim…” (24). These lines all show how the author sees the ocean, how he envisions it, how Whitman wants his readers to picture it. These images make the reader want to be present on this ship with the character. It provokes the reader to be hopeful that they will be able to feel the wind on their face, feel the boat moving across the water, see the horizon and the foam of the waves, and smell the perfume. The imagery in the poem makes the reader want to be a part of the poem, not just the reader of it.

Figurative language that is in this poem is an oxymoron in line 20-21 “liquid-flowing syllables.” This oxymoron presents itself in the poem as a peaceful confusion to the reader. Since the reader is already in a calm state from reading the soothing poem about the ocean and the peaceful waves, wind, smells, and feels, that the reader reads over the oxymoron, finds it a strange combination of words, but dismisses it because it flows and contributes to the calming mind of the poem.

The theme of the poem by Walt Whitman is the love and peacefulness of the ocean. The theme is supported by many forms of imagery, the point of view of the character, the figurative language, and the tone of the poem. The purpose of the poem is to get people to understand that nature is a beautiful concept, and a great way to demonstrate it is through describing the thoughts seen on the waters of the world. It is hard to miss the beauty of what this poem, by Whitman, is about. It shows that we all have time for beauty and nature, to relish it, to soak it in, because nature is the only way for us to really live and enjoy the world, as we know it.

Works Cited

Whitman, Walt. “In Cabin’d Ships at Sea.” *Poets.org*. Web 02 April, 2012. 02 April, 2012.